

# North Carolina's Baby Boomers

Some view aging baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, with foreboding, predicting that this "age wave" will drown the state and nation in a sea of red ink when boomers begin to use health and retirement benefits. Others speak optimistically of the resources that can be tapped from this large group of people. The reality is somewhere in between.

The future of the baby boom generation affects all of us. The issues facing boomers are intergenerational and will dictate what our families and communities will be like, now and into the next century. The relationships among our institutions—business, government, family, community—and our own planning for the future will determine whether or not a majority of our citizens are able to ride the crest of the age wave to a positive and rewarding old age.

## Rising Numbers of Older People

In 1990 there were 2 million baby boomers in North Carolina, nearly one third of the state's entire population and almost half of its workforce. The oldest boomers turned 50 in 1996, and

they will reach 65 in the year 2011—merely 14 years from now. By conservative estimate, about 1.5 million boomers will still be living in 2030, when all of them are past age 65.

## Diversity

North Carolina boomers are a diverse group, increasing the challenge of creating a policy framework that benefits all. They differ by race and ethnicity, gender, and education, and all of these have contributed to differences in income and financial well-being. The majority of North Carolina's boomers are White, but the state has had and continues to have a large African American population—at 22 percent, about twice the national average. Under current projections, 18 to 19 percent of the older population will be African American in the year 2030. Among baby boomers, people of Hispanic, Asian, and Native American heritage comprise very small proportions of the population, but younger age groups are becoming more diverse, in North Carolina as in the nation.

Just over half of North Carolina boomers are women (50.6 percent), and their proportion will increase as they out-survive boomer men. Although boomer women as a group are

